

Haym Salomon

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Introduction

Haym Salomon (born ca. 1740 in Lissa, (or Leszno), Poland; died January 6, 1785 in Philadelphia, PA), best known for his role in helping to finance the American Revolution, served as the broker to Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris from 1781 to 1784. He immigrated to colonial New York in the mid-1770s, where he first served as a sutler to the Continental Army before starting his own trading business. He fled New York in 1778 after the British troops stationed there reportedly convicted him of espionage and sentenced him to death. Salomon traveled to Philadelphia, where he reestablished himself as a broker and began working for Morris. His working knowledge of many European languages enabled him to broker bills of exchange from several countries, including France and Spain. The descendants of Haym Salomon, along with members of the American Jewish community, have used his legacy as “the financier of the American Revolution” to construct an American Jewish heritage with roots in the nation’s very beginning.

Family Background

Haym Salomon was born to poor, Jewish parents in Leszno, Poland, around the year 1740. Although little evidence of his years in Poland remains, Salomon probably left home at an early age and traveled throughout Europe. He lacked a proficient education in Jewish and secular subjects, however, his command of several European languages suggests a familiarity with various peoples and places of Europe.[1]

Salomon was born in a region long fought over by the kingdoms of Central Europe. During the eighteenth century, the Commonwealth of Poland (also known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) struggled to maintain its territorial sovereignty, contending with the political aspirations of Prussia to the west and Russia to the east. These nations, along with Hapsburg Austria to the south, exercised influence over Polish internal politics and helped to ensure that Poland remained politically disordered throughout the century. Prussia put pressure on Poland to cede control of its northwest territory in order to link the eastern and western Prussian lands and Polish leaders had to make concessions to Russia and Austria to keep the expansionist western neighbor at bay. Prussia's eventual annexation of Leszno in 1793 as part of the Second Polish Partition bestowed Salomon's birthplace with the new German name of Lissa. Political turmoil in the decades leading up to the foreign annexations of Polish territory in the late eighteenth century and persecution of Polish Jews by Christian civil and religious leaders led some Jewish residents of Lissa to resettle in new cities or countries. A fire destroyed many homes in the Jewish section of Lissa in 1767, further necessitating Jewish residents to seek housing in new locations.[2]

The exact date of, and reason for, Haym Salomon's immigration to colonial America remains obscure. Some historians have suggested that Salomon arrived in New York in 1772; other sources indicate that he did not reach the colonies until 1775.[3] Salomon's departure from Poland, and Europe more generally, roughly coincided with the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by Austria, Prussia, and Russia in 1772. The annexation of Polish territory created new social and political opportunities for some Polish Jews, but it also produced serious challenges for them as the absolutist

governments of the three states struggled with how to incorporate Polish Jews into their polities.^[4] The turmoil surrounding the annexation may have factored into Salomon's decision to leave the region.

Business Development

Despite scholarly uncertainty about when Haym Salomon arrived in colonial America, the first documentary evidence of his presence in New York dates to 1776.^[5] A document of that year listed "Hyam Solomon, the distiller" as an interpreter for a Frenchman before the New York Provisional Congress (Salomon's name was spelled various ways in the documentary record). Haym Salomon may have earned a living as a distiller either in Poland or when he first arrived in New York. Lissa (or Leszno), Poland, received local recognition for its alcohol distilling business, providing further evidence to support this claim.^[6] Jews who participated in the alcohol industry in Europe often continued to rely on this trade when they immigrated to the American colonies and later to the United States. A liquor wholesale business only required a steady supply of alcohol and customers interested in purchasing it, making it a relatively inexpensive trade in which to participate.^[7]

Salomon's original source of employment in New York, however, did not last long. In 1776, he briefly worked as a sutler to American troops stationed near Lake George, New York. Leonard Gansevoort, a lawyer and member of the Albany Committee of Correspondence, wrote a letter to Major General Philip J. Schuyler, the leader of the Northern Department of the Continental Army, to help secure this post for Salomon. "I can inform the General," stated Gansevoort, that "Mr. Solomon [sic] has hitherto sustained the character of being warmly attached to America."^[8] Despite the lack of evidence linking Haym Salomon to patriotic causes prior to 1776, he had fully aligned himself in support of American independence from Britain by the time British troops occupied New York City in September 1776.

A short time after the British occupation began, British General James Robertson arrested Haym Salomon for serving as a spy. British troops sent Salomon to the Provost, a notorious military prison in New York. General Leopold Philip von Heister, a Hessian commander, however, considered Salomon's European language skills useful and released him into his custody to serve as an interpreter and equipment and provisions supplier. Salomon had learned English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, and Russian during his travels.^[9] Although he could read Hebrew and write letters in Yiddish, his lack of a Jewish education prevented him from acquiring fluency in these two languages.^[10] Hessian mercenaries and British troops often conscripted prisoners in the eighteenth century to aid their war efforts, and his language abilities would have made Salomon a valuable asset. Jewish suppliers within the Hessian ranks most likely spearheaded the campaign to secure Salomon's release.^[11]

Salomon's work among the Hessians nonetheless enabled him to continue his personal trading and supply business. Between December 1777 and August 1778, he advertised his skills in New York newspapers at least twenty-two times. These early advertisements

announced Haym Salomon's business as providing provisions for ships. One such advertisement from 1778 indicated that Salomon sold white wine and vinegar at his store on "Broad-street, near the city-hall, No. 245, where Captains of ships and others may depend on being supplied on the most reasonable terms."^[12] He also publicized the sale of bread and rice to be consumed aboard ship.

Although Haym Salomon officially worked for Hessian troops who in turn fought for the British Army during the Revolutionary War, he secretly assisted American and French prisoners to escape from their British captors.^[13] Salomon was arrested for a second time in 1778, convicted of espionage for allegedly participating in a plot to set fire to British ships in New York harbor. Salomon reportedly received a death sentence for his supposed participation in the scheme, but he ultimately avoided death by fleeing British occupied New York. While the exact circumstances surrounding Haym Salomon's escape remain unknown, he made his way to New Jersey, where he then proceeded to Pennsylvania, arriving in Philadelphia two weeks after his initial flight from New York.^[14]

Once in Philadelphia, Haym Salomon requested financial assistance from the Continental Congress. On August 25, 1778, Salomon submitted a memorial to the members of Congress, summarizing his activities as a patriot and businessman in New York. He explained how Hessian General Heister had intervened on his behalf during his first arrest, securing his release from prison. Salomon then recounted his work as a supplier of goods to the Hessian troops and his work among American and French prisoners before narrowly escaping death after his second imprisonment by the British. "Your Memorialist," explained Salomon, "has upon this Event most irrecoverably lost all his Effects and Credits to the amount of Five or six thousand Pounds sterling and left his distressed Wife and a Child of a month old at New York waiting that they may soon have an Opportunity to come out from thence with empty hands."^[15] Haym Salomon informed the members of the Continental Congress that in fleeing New York, he left behind both his family and property and credit worth a substantial sum. He therefore looked to reestablish his career in American-controlled Philadelphia so that his wife, Rachel Franks, a member of a prominent colonial American family with German roots, and his young son could soon join him.^[16] Aside from sending Salomon's letter to the Board of War, the committee that supervised the Continental Army's affairs, Congress took no further action with regard to his petition.

Other than the petition Salomon presented to Congress in August 1778, little documentary evidence has endured that provides information about his life in Philadelphia from his arrival until the winter of 1780. When Philadelphia assessed its residents' property for tax purposes in 1780, Haym Salomon's net worth fell far below that of other Jews and non-Jews in the city. The well-known merchant Samuel Powell had property assessed at \$639,900 (approximately \$37 million in 2011 dollars). Isaac Moses, a prominent merchant from New York who settled in Philadelphia during the war, was arguably the wealthiest Jew in the city with property valued at \$115,000. Whereas other Jewish merchants like Michael Gratz, Moses Nathan, Benjamin Seixas, and Solomon Myers Cohen possessed property valued at \$92,200, \$39,400, \$33,200, and \$30,000 respectively, Haym Salomon's property was only

appraised for \$1,200 (approximately \$70,000 in 2011\$).[17] Despite Salomon's business ventures in New York, he arrived in Philadelphia with little to no money and needed to reestablish himself in business.

By 1781, however, Haym Salomon had launched a career as a financial broker, dealing with negotiable instruments such as bills of exchange (contractual agreements between two parties, typically a payer and his bank, to pay money to a third party). Like he had done previously in New York, he turned to the Philadelphia newspapers to advertise his business. The first announcement appeared in February 1781, stating that "a few Bills of Exchange on France, St. Eustatia & Amsterdam, [are] to be sold by Haym Salomon, Broker."^[18] Initially lacking office space, Salomon instead met clients in a Philadelphia coffee house daily from twelve to two in the afternoon.^[19] The use of coffeehouses to conduct financial business was a common practice in British North America and Europe in the eighteenth century, particularly before the formal establishment of the New York Stock Exchange and London Stock Exchange.^[20]

The following month, Salomon added English bills of exchange to his advertisement, along with a mention of an office. "The said Salomon will attend every day at the house of Mr. Jacob Myers, in Front-Street, next door to Stephen Sewel's, facing Pewterplatter Alley, from ten to twelve in the forenoon, and from two to four in the afternoon," stated an advertisement from March 1781.^[21] Salomon continued holding office hours from twelve to two in the afternoon at the coffee house.

As Haym Salomon built up his brokerage business in the early 1780s, so too did the Continental Congress look to formally establish an office of finance.^[22] On May 10, 1781, the Continental Congress appointed Robert Morris, a merchant and representative from Pennsylvania to the Continental Congress in the 1770s, to serve as the first superintendent of the Office of Finance, the forerunner to the Secretary of the Treasury position. One of Morris' main tasks included converting foreign bills of exchange, bills that the United States had received in the form of loans, into money that individuals could use immediately, all without diminishing the value of the loans.^[23]

Haym Salomon was hired by Robert Morris to broker bills of exchange on behalf of the nascent United States. Salomon's familiarity with European markets, along with his command of numerous European languages, made him stand out among the more than twenty other brokers operating in Philadelphia. That French Army forces in Pennsylvania were already clients of Salomon made him all the more appealing to Morris. Salomon's role as broker for the Office of Finance still enabled him to continue his private brokerage business. Within a month of his selection to this new post, Salomon advertised that he had added bills of exchange from England, Spain, Holland, and St. Croix to his growing list of countries with which he engaged in business.^[24]

Despite Haym Salomon's employment with Robert Morris, the superintendent of the Office of Finance continued to conduct business with other brokers and merchants. In a diary entry for August 27, 1781, Morris noted Salomon had met with him to discuss the

sale of Pennsylvania paper currency and the status of bills of exchange in his command. The same diary entry also indicated that Morris had partnered with Isaac Moses, a New York merchant, in business transactions as well as privateering schemes.[25]

The Revolutionary War unofficially ended in the fall of 1781 with the Battle of Yorktown. Haym Salomon's work enabled him to help raise funds for the purchase of supplies for the Continental Army's military campaign that culminated in the siege of British forces at Yorktown, Virginia. The combined efforts of the Continental Army and the French Army forced British General Cornwallis to surrender to General George Washington on October 19, 1781, effectively ending most of the land fighting in the Revolutionary War. Yet, the finances of the United States remained in disarray and the war on currency inflation continued unabated. Each state's currency, not to mention counterfeit English bills in circulation, had a different valuation and lacked silver or gold to ensure its value.[26]

Haym Salomon sold government notes and foreign bills of exchange for as great a price as possible to aid the fledgling economy. Morris determined that Salomon's commission would not surpass one-half of one percent, despite other brokers regularly collecting anywhere from a two-to five-percent profit for each transaction. Salomon then deposited the profits from his transactions into the Bank of North America, a bank established by Congress in 1781 to provide the finances needed to cover the American government's expenses. The bank received its startup funding by collecting one thousand shares valued at \$400 each (approximately \$8,300 each in 2011\$) for a total of \$400,000 (approximately \$8.4 million in 2011\$).[27] Robert Morris, along with William Bingham, Pennsylvania delegate to the Continental Congress, and Jeremiah Wadsworth, a Connecticut merchant, served as some of the individuals with the greatest subscriptions to the Bank of North America.[28] Haym Salomon also served as a stockholder in the Bank of North America, having bought two shares.[29]

The founding of the Bank of North America did not end all of the government's financial struggles. A potential financial crisis loomed in 1782 when Revolutionary War enlistees and officers demanded to receive their overdue salaries. Although the government brokered a deal enabling enlisted soldiers to receive part of their as yet unpaid salaries by August 1, 1782, Robert Morris worried that the United States did not possess the capital necessary to pay the officers. Roughly \$140,000 (approximately \$3 million in 2011\$) had been promised to them by the summer settlement deadline, but the government still needed to raise \$101,000. Morris relied on Haym Salomon to close the gap. Salomon owed approximately \$15,000 (or \$37,500) for the bills of exchange he previously sold and the Superintendent of Finance instructed him to sell more bills to cover the remaining deficit.[30]

Another financial crisis emerged just as Robert Morris and Haym Salomon resolved the army payment issue, which helps to illustrate the precariousness of the American financial system in the years that followed independence from Britain. It also suggests that Salomon did not possess large sums of money to single-handedly finance the government, as apocryphal reports have frequently asserted. When Morris required \$20,000 in the summer of 1782 to pay back a loan to the treasurer of the French Army, he called on Haym Salomon, William Bingham, and John Ross, a Philadelphia merchant.

Whereas Morris requested Salomon's presence as a broker, he sent for Bingham and Ross due to their ability to contribute large sums of money to the government. Bingham initially rebuffed the loan request, but later agreed to lend money to Morris so that he could repay the French Army agent. Ross, on the other hand, declined to lend any money, while Morris did not even ask Salomon to enter into a similar arrangement based on his meager financial assets in comparison to the other men.[\[31\]](#)

Meanwhile, Haym Salomon began referring to himself as the official broker to the Office of Finance in the summer of 1782. Robert Morris, in a diary entry from July 12, 1782, noted that Salomon "has been usefull [sic] to the public Interest and Requests leave to Publish himself as a Broker to the Office to which I have Consented as I do not see that any Disadvantage can possibly arise to the public service but the Reverse and he expects individual Benefits therefrom."[\[32\]](#) A week later, on July 20, an advertisement appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* indicating that Salomon served as "Broker to the Office of Finance, to the Consul General of France, and to the Treasurer of the French Army."[\[33\]](#)

Just as Robert Morris consulted other brokers in addition to Haym Salomon for personal and government-related matters, Haym Salomon also brokered bills of exchange for other members of Congress and for Revolutionary War generals. In the summer of 1782, James Madison, a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, wrote to Edmund Randolph, another Virginia delegate, informing him that he had employed Haym Salomon as a broker on several occasions. Salomon, according to Madison, often completed financial transactions without requesting a commission.[\[34\]](#) Madison explained, "the price of money is so usurious that he [Salomon] thinks it ought to be extorted from none but those who aim at profitable speculations." Madison also noted that "to a necessitous delegate he [Salomon] gratuitously spares a supply out of his private stock."[\[35\]](#) Edmund Randolph also used Haym Salomon as a broker, as did senior generals in the Continental Army such as Baron von Steuben, Arthur St. Clair, and Thomas Mifflin.[\[36\]](#)

Salomon's distinguished client list emphasized his reputation as a dependable broker. After the unexpected depletion of American capital drawn on French loans caused several bills of exchange to be rendered of little value, Haym Salomon declared that he would still honor all bills of exchange that bore his signature.[\[37\]](#) Salomon, nevertheless, more than once unknowingly fell victim to deceitful business practices. In addition to his work as a broker, Salomon also sold goods for Morris and the government. In September 1782, a French businessman offered to sell Robert Morris shirts for soldiers but Morris questioned the transaction, believing that Salomon had already bought the same shirts. When Salomon explained that he had indeed already purchased the shirts for Morris, he learned that the original seller had simultaneously sold the very same shipment to another unknowing buyer, who then attempted to sell the shirts to Morris for a second time.[\[38\]](#)

In 1783, Salomon again found himself unwittingly at the center of a dishonest business scheme. Salomon had sold bills on credit to the director of Philadelphia's French hospital. When the director failed to repay Salomon, denying the existence of the bills, Salomon

escalated the case to a criminal matter. The case went to trial in March 1783, resulting in a guilty verdict for both the hospital director and his financial agent. Salomon collected the \$3,500 owed to him in addition to receiving payment to cover his legal fees.[\[39\]](#)

Although Salomon eventually recovered the money owed to him, the fledgling United States had a difficult time recovering from the economic strains placed on the nation during the Revolutionary War. When the Bank of North America required more capital to continue functioning in 1784, it put out a second call for subscriptions. Salomon bought subscriptions for himself and for a Dutch firm he represented, as did several other subscribers. The infusion of cash created by issuing the additional shares in the bank, however, did not prevent a group of private citizens from issuing a request to charter a new bank, which ultimately threatened to upend the solvency of the American economy.[\[40\]](#)

A charter for the proposed Bank of Pennsylvania could have jeopardized the United States' credit. Support for the establishment of a new bank centered on increased profits for its shareholders. Yet the weak economy, coupled with the Bank of North America's fight to maintain the credit of the United States, risked destroying both banking ventures. Robert Morris, in his diary, noted that "Haym Solomon [sic] informs me that Edward Shippen and others chosen President and Directors of a new Bank lately instituted in Opposition to the National Bank have presented a Petition for a Charter of Incorporation."[\[41\]](#) Morris, along with Salomon, opposed the establishment of the Bank of Pennsylvania.

A proponent for the Bank of Pennsylvania waged an anti-Semitic attack against Haym Salomon and other Jews. Miers Fisher, a Quaker lawyer from Pennsylvania, argued that the new bank charter would decrease interest rates and would prevent Jewish brokers from charging extremely high rates. A response to Fisher's diatribe appeared in Philadelphia's *Independent Gazetteer* on March 13, 1784. While the author signed the rebuttal as "A Jew Broker," suggesting that Haym Salomon perhaps penned the piece, Eleazar Oswald, the newspaper's editor, served as the more likely author. By underscoring Fisher's Tory sensibilities during the Revolutionary War and discrediting him as a loyal American patriot, the article attempted to delegitimize his claims of Jewish brokers' usury.[\[42\]](#) "You not only endeavoured [sic] to injure me by your unwarrantable expressions, but every other person of the same *religious* persuasion I hold," explained the author of the article, "and which the laws of the country, and the glorious toleration and *liberty of conscience* have allowed me to indulge and adopt."[\[43\]](#) The "Jew Broker" argued that the laws of the new nation permitted Jews to practice their religion and any opposition to a Jewish presence would be contradicting American principles.[\[44\]](#)

This debate continued for several months, as did the controversy surrounding the creation of the Bank of Pennsylvania. Following the *Independent Gazetteer*'s reply to Miers Fisher's anti-Semitic attack, other newspaper articles issued their own opinions on the controversy. While some papers joined in the attack and proposed that Jews would be better off living outside of Pennsylvania, others came to the Jews' defense. The Bank of Pennsylvania ultimately failed to establish itself in opposition to the Bank of North America. Robert Morris and his Bank of North America colleagues feared that a

competing bank would seriously harm their own profits, as well as the American economy. They allowed the public to buy stock in the Bank of North America, thereby reducing interest in incorporating the Bank of Pennsylvania.[45]

Meanwhile, Haym Salomon made arrangements in 1784 to return to New York. Like many other successful New York transplants who arrived in Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War, Salomon longed to return to the city he first encountered upon arriving in America. Gouverneur Morris, Robert Morris' deputy, sent a letter to Robert Livingston, the chancellor of New York, requesting a license for Haym Salomon to operate an auction business. Morris recommended that Salomon receive a license due to his "fidelity" and because "he has always been a decided Wig [sic]."[46] Salomon's patriotism to the American nation garnered the attention of Gouverneur Morris, who believed that such loyalty should be rewarded in business. Salomon partnered with American-born Jacob Mordecai to open a brokerage and auction house in New York City. The business partners sold various fabrics, liquors, spices, China and dishware, teas, and shoes.[47] An illness and Salomon's eventual death, however, prevented him from returning to New York to work in the store that Jacob Mordecai had already opened.[48]

Haym Salomon died in Philadelphia on January 6, 1785, at the age of forty-five. Despite his short but successful career as a broker and merchant in Philadelphia, he died insolvent. Although estimates placed the value of his estate around \$353,000 (approximately \$8.4 million in 2011\$), much of this money existed in the form of certificates of indebtedness and government currency, which had greatly lost their value over time. His assets totaled \$44,732, yet he owed \$45,292 (approximately \$1 million dollars in 2011\$), causing him to be in debt by \$560 when he died (approximately \$13,400 in 2011\$).[49] Some of Salomon's creditors played a role in executing his estate and they therefore ensured that their debts were repaid before handing over the rest of the estate to Salomon's widow, Rachel Franks. She ultimately only received the household furnishings. Without money for a headstone, Salomon was buried in an unmarked grave in congregation Mikveh Israel's Spruce Street Cemetery in Philadelphia. [50]

Salomon's insolvency highlighted the economic instability of the early United States and the relative frequency with which individuals became indebted. Just before Salomon's death, on December 24, 1784, Joseph Nourse, the registrar of the United States Treasury wrote to James Milligan, the comptroller of the United States Treasury, informing him that he wanted to withdraw the funds he had either deposited or loaned to Haym Salomon. "Since writing the letter that will be delivered to you herewith," stated Nourse, "I have seen Quaker Brown of Philadelphia, who acquaints us that Mr. Meade hath failed, and that some Jew brokers have also broke, that people appear dubious and look strange at each other."[51] The registrar of the United States Treasury worried that the money currently in Salomon's possession would not be available at a later date. The insolvency of more than 300 Philadelphia merchants between 1787 and 1791 justified his fear. Only Alexander Hamilton's fiscal program of 1791 and the ratification of the Federal

Constitution helped to ease Americans' economic troubles.^[52] Yet, these measures did not help Robert Morris, whose speculative pursuits ultimately bankrupted him by 1797. Morris spent a number of years in a debtors' prison before dying penniless.^[53]

Social Status, Family Life, and Networks

Prior to Haym Salomon's death, he established a family and communal life outside of his business dealings. On July 6, 1777, Haym Salomon married fifteen-year-old Rachel Franks, the daughter of a Jewish tailor from the prestigious Franks family. The twenty-one-year age difference between Salomon and Franks was not uncommon in the late eighteenth century, where marriages often served to cement social and financial ties between families, particularly within Jewish communities. Abraham I. Abrahams officiated the marriage ceremony, held at the Shearith Israel synagogue in New York.^[54]

Whereas little evidence remains of Salomon's family history, more information exists on Rachel Franks and her immediate family. She was born on May 7, 1762, in the American colonies and was descended from a prominent Jewish colonial family. A patriarch of the Franks family, Jacob Franks, was born in Germany in 1688, and moved to London prior to his arrival in New York, where he became a merchant.^[55] The Franks heavily intermarried with non-Jews, leaving Salomon and Rachel's children as the only Franks descendants who continued to practice Judaism.^[56] That roughly 28.7 percent of all recorded marriages involving Jews from 1776 to 1840 resulted in interfaith marriages demonstrated that the Franks, like other Jewish families, experienced increasing social acceptance in colonial America and the nascent United States.^[57]

Rachel Franks gave birth to her first son, Ezekiel, on July 20, 1778. Only weeks later, Haym Salomon fled to Philadelphia to avoid being sentenced to death for his alleged crimes against British troops at the height of the Revolutionary War. Rachel and Ezekiel remained in New York before being reunited with Haym Salomon in Philadelphia. Later additions to the family included Sally on October 17, 1779, Deborah on January 12, 1783, and Haym M. Salomon on April 23, 1785, born four months after Salomon died.^[58]

Haym Salomon, cut off from communication from his family in the Polish lands during the Revolutionary War, resumed correspondence after the fighting ended. Salomon asked Israel Myers of New York to send letters on his behalf. In one such letter, Salomon, writing in English, requested Myers to convey to his father "the difficulty that I have labored under in not having any learning, and that I should not have known what to have done had it not been for the languages that I learned in my travels, such as French, English, etc. Therefore would advise him and all my relations to have their children well educated particularly in the Christian language and should any of my brother's children have a good head to learn Hebrew [I] would contribute towards his being instructed."^[59] Salomon considered his language skills an asset in business and he urged his younger family members to learn "the Christian language." Despite his ability to read Hebrew, Salomon could not write Hebrew, thus necessitating his request to Israel Myers to reply to his family's letter.^[60]

Salomon explained his economic status in a letter he wrote to his uncle. “Your ideas of my riches are too extensive,” stated Salomon, adding “rich I am not, but the little I have I think it my duty to share with my poor father and mother.”[61] Salomon did send money to his uncle, but he warned that his family members should not expect yearly monetary gifts. In the same letter, Salomon also expressed his surprise at his uncle’s desire to immigrate to the United States. He advised his family to remain in the Polish lands, as he could not “imagine what you mean to do here.”[62] Salomon believed that the United States lacked not only economic opportunities for his family, but it also lacked Jewish opportunities.[63]

Nonetheless, Haym Salomon participated in the Jewish community of Philadelphia. In 1782, he donated the largest sum to congregation Mikveh Israel’s building campaign by pledging to pay twenty-five percent of the synagogue’s overall construction costs. Although he once declined service as a synagogue officer and paid the accompanying fine, in 1783 Salomon agreed to serve on the synagogue board. He also held the position of treasurer for the Travellers Aid Society, associated with Mikveh Israel, which is considered the earliest Jewish charity in the United States.[64]

Salomon, along with other Jews in Philadelphia, petitioned the Pennsylvania Council of Censors to remove the Christian test oath required of all public office holders. Barnard Gratz, Asher Myers, Simon Nathan, Jonas Phillips, Gershom Seixas, and Haym Salomon opposed the state constitution’s stipulation made of all its office holders and demanded that the offending clause be removed so that Jews could serve in politics and other public positions, just as they had served the country during the Revolutionary War. The petition to change the state constitution failed in 1783, but Pennsylvania removed the clause in 1790, promoting religious equality.[65]

Many Philadelphia brokers and merchants who experienced an increase in their wealth and social standing moved their families to neighborhoods that better reflected their new socio-economic status. Yet Haym Salomon maintained his living quarters in a residence on crowded Front Street in the same building in which he worked. The Salomon family occupied space in a back room of his office as well as space on the floor above the office. Whereas the mahogany furnishings of the Salomon home suggested a modicum of wealth, they did not compare to the possessions found in larger homes occupied by other Jews who had lived in Philadelphia for a similar number of years.[66]

Salomon’s Legacy

Best known for his work as a broker to Robert Morris, the superintendent of the Office of Finance, Haym Salomon’s legacy also includes his philanthropic contributions to the Philadelphia Jewish community and his patriotism during the Revolutionary War. Yet subsequent generations of American Jewish groups have transformed Salomon’s legacy from one of fact to one of legend. Haym Salomon, rather than simply being recognized as a broker to Robert Morris, became the sole financier of the American Revolution, one who often supplied his own money to aid the war effort. In this mythic retelling of Salomon’s life, he became an American Jewish hero who died without receiving recognition for his work or repayment for the funds he loaned the government.[67]

Salomon's descendants first perpetuated the myth portraying him as an unacknowledged American patriot. Haym M. Salomon, Salomon's son born after his death in 1785, wrote to James Madison in 1827 requesting information about the president's business dealings with his father in the late eighteenth century. Madison informed the younger Salomon that he had indeed used the elder Salomon as a broker and had received funds from him during his time as a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, but that he had repaid any debt owed. In 1843, Haym M. Salomon presented President John Tyler with financial documents concerning alleged outstanding loans owed to his father.^[68] Salomon's son first petitioned Congress in 1846, at the age of sixty-one, for financial compensation purportedly due to his father. He submitted further petitions to Congress throughout the mid-nineteenth century requesting government compensation. Including interest, estimates for compensation ranged from \$300,000 to \$650,000. Although some congressional committees supported the petitions of Haym M. Salomon, Congress ultimately rejected all of them.^[69]

A new generation of Haym Salomon descendants also sought recognition for the American broker's contributions to the nation. In 1893, younger descendants requested not money, but a medal to honor Salomon's service to America during the Revolutionary War. The timing of the petition coincided with the establishment of the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution and the growing national interest in erecting Civil War monuments. This latest attempt to commemorate Haym Salomon served as one of several examples of Americans' growing interest in historical memory and commemorations of the past.^[70]

By the beginning of the twentieth-century, American interest in commemorating Haym Salomon's legacy turned into a public discussion among American Jews. Various organizations, including the Haym Salomon National Monument Committee, the Federation of Jewish Organizations, and the Federation of Polish Hebrews, later to be called the Federation of Polish Jews, looked to erect a monument in honor of Salomon. When the Federation of Polish Hebrews sought to create a statue of Salomon in Madison Square Park on Twenty-Third Street, and then at Lincoln Square at Sixty-Sixth Street and Broadway in Manhattan after the New York Municipal Art Commission rejected the first proposal, Jews divided over the advisability of such a monument. The members of the Federation viewed the proposed monument as a testament to the patriotism of Polish Jews in the United States since the country's founding.^[71]

Other Jews, such as Louis Marshall, the leader of the American Jewish Committee, opposed the establishment of a monument commemorating Salomon's contributions. "Personally I seriously question the advisability of erecting a monument to Haym Salomon," Marshall wrote to Leon Huhner, a lawyer and historian, in 1926. He explained that Salomon "doubtless rendered useful services as a broker during the Revolutionary War. I do not believe that he had any money of his own to lend to the Government; nor do I believe that he rendered any exceptional service." Louis Marshall, however, believed that Salomon "appealed to the pride of the Jewish people, and in that way has rendered a great service."^[72] While Haym Salomon's legacy enabled American Jews to claim a Jewish heritage in the United States that dated back to the Revolution and even prior to

American independence, Louis Marshall did not think that this warranted the establishment of a monument. Nor did the American Jewish Historical Society, a national organization dedicated to documenting American Jewish life, which issued a report on Haym Salomon's life refuting claims that he had singlehandedly financed the American Revolution.[73]

A monument honoring Haym Salomon was ultimately never erected in New York. Salomon's second place of residence in the United States, Philadelphia, also never built a statue, but Chicago and Los Angeles did eventually build monuments to Salomon. A Chicago politician and lawyer of Polish-Jewish descent, Barnett Hodes, introduced the idea for a monument honoring patriots of the American Revolution in the mid-1930s. Whereas earlier proposals focused on memorializing Haym Salomon and functioned as distinctly Jewish endeavors, Hodes' project more generally looked to commemorate Revolutionary patriots. The Chicago Patriotic Foundation authorized the creation of the Great Triumvirate of Patriots monument, erected in Herald Square in Chicago and dedicated on December 15, 1941. The monument depicts Robert Morris, George Washington, and Haym Salomon, and is accompanied with the inscription from Washington's well-known statement that the American government "gives to bigotry no sanction to persecution no assistance." [74] The Chicago monument acknowledged Salomon's patriotism and service during the American Revolution without making unsubstantiated claims about his financial involvement in the fight for independence. Unlike the Chicago monument, the one in Los Angeles, commissioned by the Polish-American Jewish Federation and dedicated in 1944, depicted Salomon independent of other American patriots. The decision to erect a monument honoring Haym Salomon in Los Angeles did not lead to contested debates among the city's Jews, as had proposals for such a monument in New York City.[75]

Haym Salomon's legacy has continued to be depicted in a variety of forms. Children's books, including both elements of fact and fiction, have addressed the story of Haym Salomon. In 1971, a radio station operated by the Newark, New Jersey, Board of Education aired a dramatization of "Haym Salomon: A Life for Liberty" as part of its *They Led The Way* series, a program focusing on the presentation of historical accounts of well-known individuals from a variety of religions and races.[76] The Jewish-American Hall of Fame designed a Haym Salomon medal in 1972, meant to serve as a substitute for the 1893 medal denied by Congress. The United States Postal Service issued a stamp in 1975 honoring Salomon's service to the Revolution. The postal stamp, part of the "Contributors to the Cause" series, classified Salomon as a "financial hero." [77]

Conclusion

Haym Salomon immigrated to colonial America in the 1770s, bringing with him his working knowledge of several European languages. Despite his elementary education in Jewish and secular subjects, Salomon worked as a merchant in New York before escaping to Philadelphia in 1778 at the height of the Revolutionary War. In Philadelphia, Salomon established himself as a merchant and broker and earned the distinction of being the official broker to the Office of Finance. Subsequent generations of American

Jews have used Salomon's patriotism and service during the fight for independence to forge an American-Jewish heritage with roots dating back to the founding of the United States.

Salomon's Jewish immigrant identity informed his professional life in the American colonies and later the United States. His likely first source of employment was as an alcohol distiller, a trade he probably learned while still in Lissa (Leszno). Continued participation in the liquor industry, albeit only temporarily, enabled Salomon to connect his past in Europe with his future in the nascent United States.^[78] His travels throughout Europe prior to arriving in New York in the 1770s also affected his future business dealings. Salomon's knowledge of several European languages, including German, French, and Italian, enabled him to conduct business with international clients in his own endeavors as well as those for the Office of Finance.

Salomon's religious and ethnic identity also informed his personal life. As a Jew from Lissa (Leszno), he married Rachel Franks, a member of the prominent American colonial family with German roots. He held leadership positions within the Philadelphia Jewish community and petitioned for the repeal of the Christian test oath required of all individuals appointed to public office. Haym Salomon's ethnic identity inspired subsequent generations of American Jews to laud his accomplishments as the "financier of the American Revolution," thereby suggesting that American-Jewish identity was also linked to the formation of the United States.

Notes

[1] Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*. Volume 1 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 66.

[2] Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), 101-102.

[3] Beth Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 181.

[4] Nancy Sinkoff, *Out of the Shtetl: Making Jews Modern in the Polish Borderlands* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2004), 1-4.

[5] Nathan Kaganoff, "The Business Career of Haym Salomon As Reflected in His Newspaper Advertisements," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 66. No. 1 (September 1976): 35.

[6] Marcus. 66; Wolf and Whiteman, 102, 410 n. 31.

[7] See for instance: Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 15-17. Although Davis' analysis focuses on Jews in the alcohol industry in the nineteenth century rather than the

eighteenth century, her work nonetheless demonstrates a clear continuation of Jewish participation in the distilling process, both before and after their immigration to the United States.

[8] Jacob Rader Marcus, ed. *American Jewry: Documents; Eighteenth Century* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1959), 236; Wolf and Whiteman, 102-103.

[9] Renee Critcher Lyons, *Foreign-Born American Patriots: Sixteen Volunteer Leaders in the Revolutionary War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 33.

[10] Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), 39.

[11] Edwin G. Burrows, *Forgotten Patriots: The Untold Story of American Prisoners during the Revolutionary War* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 112; Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 67.

[12] Kaganoff, 35, 39.

[13] Wolf and Whiteman, 103.

[14] Samuel Rezneck, *Unrecognized Patriots: The Jews in the American Revolution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 82-83; Burrows, 112; Wolf and Whiteman, 103.

[15] Wolf and Whiteman, 104.

[16] For more information on the genealogy of the Franks family, see for instance: Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1992), 32-33.

[17] *Ibid.*, 99; Rezneck, 70. \$30,000 was roughly equivalent to \$1.7 million in 2011\$. Determining contemporary values for historical currency values, particularly prior to the nineteenth century, is not an exact science. Based on John McCusker's currency conversion tables, one Pennsylvania Pound from the 1780s would be worth approximately \$58-\$62 dollars in 2011. See John McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), 333 and the U.S. Consumer Price Index series available through [Measuring Worth: Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount-1774 to Present](#), (accessed August 27, 2014).

[18] Quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, 104.

[19] Wolf and Whiteman, 104.

[20] Rik W. Hafer and Scott E. Hein, *The Stock Market* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 11; Mansel G. Blackford, *The Rise of Modern Business: Great Britain, the United States, Germany, Japan, and China* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 21-24.

[21] Kaganoff, 39; Wolf and Whiteman, 104-105.

[22] Although the Congress of the Confederation served as the official name for the governing body of the United States from 1781 to 1789, historians have conventionally referred to the Congresses from 1774 to 1789 as the Continental Congresses. See for instance: Calvin Jillson and Rick K. Wilson, *Congressional Dynamics: Structure, Coordination, and Choice in the First American Congress, 1774-1789* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 345, n. 1.

[23] Wolf and Whiteman, 105.

[24] Kaganoff, 40.

[25] E. James Ferguson, ed. *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784*. Volume 2: August-September 1781 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 108-109; Rezneck, 70-71.

[26] Wolf and Whiteman, 106-107.

[27] This and all subsequent historical dollar conversions computed using the U.S. Consumer Price Index series available through [Measuring Worth: Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount-1774 to Present](#), (accessed August 27, 2014).

[28] Jerry W. Markham, *A Financial History of the United States: From Christopher Columbus to the Robber Barons (1492-1900)*. Vol. 1 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 71-72.

[29] Wolf and Whiteman, 107.

[30] Rezneck, 88-89.

[31] *Ibid.*, 89-90.

[32] E. James Ferguson and John Catanzariti, eds. *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784*. Volume 5: April 16-July 20, 1782 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 567-568.

[33] Quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, 107.

[34] Marcus, 69.

[35] Wolf and Whiteman, 108.

[36] *Ibid.*, 108.

[37] *Ibid.*, 109; Marcus, 69.

[38] Rezneck, 89.

[39] *Ibid.*, 90-91.

[40] Marcus, 110.

[41] Diary: February 10, 1784. *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784*. Volume 9: January-October 30, 1784. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll and Mary A. Gallagher, eds. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 97.

[42] Marcus, 70.

[43] Quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, 112. Emphasis in original.

[44] Jews in America did not possess equal rights in the 1780s. Haym Salomon, along with five other Jews from Philadelphia, petitioned the Pennsylvania Council of Censors to remove the Christian oath required of all individuals who sought public office. See for instance: Rezneck, 96.

[45] Marcus, 70.

[46] Letter from Gouverneur Morris to Robert R. Livingston. April 2, 1784. *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784*. Vol 9: January 1-October 30, 1784. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll and Mary A. Gallagher, eds. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 223.

[47] Kaganoff, 45-46; "Sales at Auction by Order of Haym Solomon," March 5, 1784. Haym Salomon Papers. Collection P-41. Box 1. Folder: Haym Salomon Sales List, March 5, 1784. American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), Center for Jewish History (CJH), New York, New York.

[48] Marcus, 71.

[49] Rezneck, 96.

[50] Marcus, 73, 76.

[51] Letter from Joseph Nourse to Haym Salomon. December 24, 1784. *Marcus, American Jewry: Eighteenth Century Documents*, 443.

[52] *Ibid.*, 442.

[53] Rezneck, 97.

[54] Diana L. Linden, "Visual Essay: An Introduction to the Visual and Material Culture of New York City Jews, 1654-1865," in Howard Rock's *Haven of Liberty: New York Jews in the New World, 1654-1865* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 284.

[55] Laurens R. Schwartz, *Jews and the American Revolution: Haym Salomon and Others* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1987), 13.

[56] Rezneck, 95.

[57] Jonathan Sarna. *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 45.

[58] Births and Deaths of Family of Haym M. Salomon. Haym Salomon Collection. Collection P-41. Box 3. Folder: Typed Copies of Documents. AJHS, CJH.

[59] Letter from Haym Salomon to Israel Myers. April 29, 1783. Haym Salomon Papers. Collection 41. Box 3. Folder: Typed Copies of Documents. AJHS, CJH.

[60] Hyman B. Grinstein, "A Haym Salomon Letter to Rabbi David Tevele Schiff, London, 1784," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*. Vol. 34 (January 1937), 112.

[61] Letter from Haym Salomon to Uncle. July 10, 1783. Haym Salomon Papers. Collection P-41. Box 3. Folder: Typed Copies of Documents. AJHS, CJH.

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] Sarna, 45.

[64] Marcus, 72.

[65] Rezneck, 96; Wenger, 183.

[66] Wolf and Whiteman, 109.

[67] Wenger, 179-184.

[68] Rezneck, 215.

[69] Wenger, 185.

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] Wenger, 187-191.

[72] Letter from Louis Marshall to Leon Huhner. February 17, 1926. Haym Salomon Papers. Collection P-41. Box 2. Folder: Leon Huhner. AJHS, CJH.

[73] Wenger, 194; "Report by Samuel Oppenheim," June 8, 1926. Haym Salomon Papers. Colelcction P-41. Box 1. Folder: Oppenheim Report, 1926. AJHS, CJH.

[74] Wenger, 198.

[75] *Ibid.*, 200-201.

[76] "Haym Salomon" A Life for Liberty," Undated. Haym Salomon Papers. Collection P-41. Box 3. Folder: Haym Salomon-A Life for Liberty, WBGO, Bd. Of Educ. Station, Newark, NY, 1971. AJHS, CJH.

[77] Wenger, 203-206.

[78] Davis, 15.